



2021 CITY OF GAITHERSBURG LEGISLATIVE POLICY PRIORITIES

Every year, the City of Gaithersburg Mayor and City Council adopt policy priorities to guide the City's efforts in participating meaningfully in the Maryland General Assembly session. While this year has differed from previous ones in many ways, the need to articulate and stand by our policy principles remains as important as ever.

The City of Gaithersburg has worked tirelessly to mitigate the challenging public health and economic effects that the coronavirus pandemic has created for our residents, employees, and business owners. At the same time, we have continued to provide the day-to-day municipal services our residents expect and deserve – all of which have become exceedingly difficult to provide during this unprecedented crisis. For the foreseeable future, the on-going pandemic will continue to impact our revenues, human resources, and other

assets – literally requiring the City to do more with less.

Gaithersburg is not alone in having to address these issues. To the contrary, the entire world grapples with them. On some level, this might provide comfort, or a sense of unity. Unfortunately, it also stretches demand for whatever aid may be available.

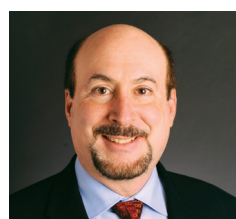
We are working to overcome the challenges by drawing upon our steadfast resiliency and our ability to work collaboratively with our partners and stakeholders. As such, this year's list of proposed policy priorities all seek to secure and maintain the tools necessary for the City of Gaithersburg to exercise that unique resilience. We look forward to working with all levels of government as we continue to proactively plan, prepare, and respond to keep our residents and visitors safe and healthy.



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Highway User Revenue

The City of Gaithersburg needs every revenue source available to meet our obligations to our residents and the community. The City's Public Works Division maintains nearly 93 miles of streets. We must keep these streets safe and traffic controlled so our emergency vehicles can serve our most vulnerable, so freight vehicles can deliver PPE and other medical necessities, so employers can reopen, and so our residents can get back to work.

For more than a decade the City has requested full restoration of Highway User Revenues (HUR) for municipalities—a critical program to proportionately distribute a fair share of transportation revenues essential for supporting local road maintenance in Maryland's cities and towns. In order to safeguard municipal HUR, the sunset provision that is set to expire after Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 must be eliminated. If the sunset is not repealed, the funding in FY 2025 will decrease by \$30 million, leaving only \$9 million available to spread across 156 municipalities.

A full and permanent restoration of HUR will provide the City with the necessary resources to plan and deliver road maintenance and improvement projects. The ability to preserve our streets not only benefits our residents, but all of Maryland's constituents who travel on Gaithersburg streets and arteries.



Preserve Local Authority and Access to Technology

Despite years of modernization efforts in Maryland, the COVID-19 crisis has exposed the failure of our digital infrastructure to meet the demands of the "new normal." Ensuring affordable, reliable, high-quality broadband service for all Maryland residents and communities should be a priority. We must work to preserve net neutrality so that all of our residents can continue to access necessary websites and web-based services, regardless of provider. Additionally, in order to

sufficiently protect and maintain our rights-of-way, we must retain all of the existing abilities to charge fees for infrastructure installation and deployment.

The City fully supports advancements in technology. However, we strongly oppose any effort, state or federal, that would narrow the ability of local governments to oversee certain wireless facility modifications and fee authorizations, or regulations that impede us from exercising the land use and design authority granted to us to facilitate the siting of small wireless infrastructure in our jurisdiction. Local governments must retain authority over our public right-of-ways, allowing us to preserve the integrity of our neighborhoods and aesthetics of our community.



Preserve and Protect Local Revenue Streams

As the pandemic depletes access to revenues while simultaneously requiring increased expenditures, it becomes even more essential to ensure that the City has the fair and equitable ability to preserve and protect its existing revenue streams. Property tax is one of the largest sources of revenue for local governments. Every three years, the Maryland State Department of Assessments and Taxation sets the value for all property in the state. Property assessments are conducted yearly and are based on the "market value" or "the most probable price" for which a property would sell under normal market conditions. Assessments may be appealed annually by property owners, other taxpayers, or local governments. However, Maryland law prevents local governments from appealing assessments for the two "out-of-cycle" years.

The current economic climate may widely alter existing market determinants and benchmarks used to establish property values – and we cannot reliably foresee how long or how quickly these changes may take to surface and adversely impact our revenues. As such, it is particularly important now to provide local

government greater and more reasonable access to appeal the State's property assessments and ensure that their basis for tax revenues remains fair and accurate.



COVID-19 Relief for Small Businesses & Nonprofit Organizations

Impacts from the pandemic on small businesses and nonprofit organizations continue to grow, and it is vital that we secure financial relief during the legislative session. While some small businesses have been able to pivot to new revenue streams, these new streams are not always sufficient. In addition, small businesses need additional assistance as relief funding expires and they continue to struggle with new occupancy restrictions. Small businesses are the backbone of our community and provide the economic diversity that is so important to Gaithersburg.

Nonprofit organizations are also dealing with the devastating impact of the pandemic. Local governments depend on nonprofits to provide high-quality, affordable services that are accessible to residents in their community. Nonprofits are particularly vulnerable because their funding structures rely on grants, individual giving, and annual fundraising events. In order to continue providing services, many nonprofits have been forced to reduce services due to layoffs and furloughs or to reduce employee pay and benefits. Nonprofits also include Arts and Humanities organizations, an often overlooked subsection. These organizations include individual artists, scholars and performance events—which are negatively impacted by closures and occupancy restrictions. As a result, even when vaccinations are widely available, revenue opportunities are likely to be limited well into the next year or two.



FY22 Budget Request for the Construction of a Pedestrian Bridge at Great Seneca Highway

The pedestrian bridge across Great

Seneca Highway at the intersection of Kentlands Boulevard/Orchard Ridge Drive is a public private partnership between the City of Gaithersburg and AstraZeneca. The bridge will provide 4,000 AstraZeneca employees and the 1,700 residents of the Quince Orchard Park neighborhood with safe pedestrian and bicycle access across Great Seneca Highway to the Kentlands commercial area. It will also provide a pedestrian and bicycle link for the 10,000 residents of the Kentlands and Lakelands neighborhoods to Discovery Park, the City's newest recreational amenity located in Quince Orchard Park.



Moving Our Community

We extend our sincere appreciation for the State's investments in the City's essential transportation projects, including the recent completion of the interchange on I-270 at Watkins Mill Road. The City commends MDOT for completing the project ahead of schedule in the midst of an unprecedented national health crisis. The new interchange is more than just another exit. It is a vital link to residential and commercial developments that will provide new energy to the northern and western reaches of our community.

The City's most immediate need is to address the capacity issues that remain at MD 117 (Clopper Road/Diamond Avenue). Prior to COVID-19, the completion of the Watkins Mill Interchange was expected to significantly impact the use of Clopper Road, especially where it intersects with Watkins Mill, Quince Orchard and Longdraft Roads. For almost two decades, the project has been pushed back as a funding priority. During this time, the City of Gaithersburg has undergone significant changes. Our population has grown substantially, and we are now a major regional location for biotech companies. As traffic patterns begin to normalize, we expect pre-existing capacity and safety issues to reemerge. While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted virtually all MDOT operations and revenues, it is our hope that the

State will find the resources to make interim improvements to address the immediate safety and travel challenges our residents face.

The City of Gaithersburg is served by the MARC Brunswick Line. We would be remiss if we did not mention our disappointment that the MARC Improvement Project, a Primary Construction Project for the MTA, does not include funding for the Brunswick Line. During recent ridership peaks, the Line boarded a combined average of 500 riders each workday, carrying 22 percent of all MARC passengers. The line also had the second largest share of average annual passengers throughout

the MARC system. The Brunswick Line is an important element to the City's on-going economic growth and our residents' ability to travel to work, access services, and enjoy activities and recreation outside of the City. The MDOT MTA's Capital Needs Inventory outlines various improvements that are needed to address facility maintenance and station renovations to ensure riders a safe, reliable and pleasant experience. We respectfully request that MDOT reconsider funding the Brunswick Line in the FY21-26 CTP to address the increasingly pressing need for improvements.

Thank You for Supporting the City of Gaithersburg

We thank all of Maryland's Senators and Delegates for their support of our initiatives. We are especially grateful to the District 17 Delegation for their continued advocacy on behalf of the residents of Gaithersburg.

Senator Cheryl Kagan
Delegate Kumar Barve
Delegate Jim Gilchrist
Delegate Julie Palakovich Carr



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